

01287

1964/08/07



Research and Reference Service

SUMMARY OF INITIAL REACTION TO VIETNAM SITUATION

(Based on material available through August 6)

R-109-64

August 7, 1964

This is a research report, not a statement of Agency policy

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SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

World comment on the Vietnamese situation is generally sober, watchful, and concerned. U.S. actions are predominantly seen as justified, although some uneasy undertones are heard. U.S. actions and statements are commonly described as "firm and restrained," with restraint particularly welcomed. Some critical views are expressed, but criticism prevails only in strongly neutralist countries and papers. Fear that the conflict might broaden is manifest in strongly expressed hopes that it will not, and in counsels of caution, but outright alarm appears limited.

--- U.S. military action is accepted as justified and the U.S. version of events given general credence in most comment and most areas. The idea of a "measured response" finds some recognition, and most comment sees U.S. retaliatory action as putting the next move squarely up to the Communists.

--- Unfavorable views appear to stem chiefly from feelings that U.S. actions endangered peace. There are some charges of reckless "adventurism," and too ready recourse to military solutions. Unfriendly quarters see "aggression."

--- There is some editorial attention to the idea that U.S. moves may have been influenced by domestic political considerations, and the future political impact within the U.S. draws speculation.

--- Widespread and wide-ranging speculation about Communist motives for attacking U.S. naval craft showed no immediate consensus. The attacks were generally viewed as deliberate, most often Peiping-inspired, and by some thought to indicate a Chinese Communist desire to provoke an "explosion" in the Far East that would force the USSR to decide between "peaceful coexistence" and "support of a socialist state threatened by imperialism." Some comment saw the Vietnamese attacks as designed to "test" the U.S.

--- Although future Communist moves are anxiously assayed, comment reflected no clear agreement on their probable nature, scope, or vigor, and tended to be hazy and generalized with respect to possible Communist steps.

--- In stressing the need and hopes for a peaceful resolution, recourse to the U.N. is most frequently mentioned. General reminders of the grave dangers of an escalating conflict are frequent, but specific roads to settlement are not often advocated, beyond stressing the desirability of negotiation. Relationships between recent air and naval actions, and the continuing conflict in South Vietnam, draw little specific attention.

Area reactions to Vietnam developments follow, along with a summary of Communist propaganda treatment.

WESTERN EUROPE

News of the American decision to retaliate against North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin was proclaimed in banner headlines in virtually all West European newspapers. President Johnson's television and radio speech to the nation Tuesday evening was widely quoted and continued coverage of all events pertaining to Far Eastern developments indicate continuing concern.

Support for U.S. Action

Most major West European newspapers expressed support for President Johnson's decision to carry out retaliatory action. London's Laborite Daily Herald typified much European response in declaring that the American action was "understandable" and that "nobody could expect America to let its warships be shot at with impunity." Britain's mass-circulation Daily Mail declared that the crisis can be surmounted if we "stand united" and the Daily Express urged "a full measure of moral and diplomatic support" for the United States. By contrast, the liberal Guardian was one of the few papers to say that "the United States cannot expect from the rest of the world a good press."

Most observers believed that the Communist attacks against the U.S. ships were unprovoked and that they clearly took place in international waters. Tribune de Geneve asserted that the two North Vietnamese attacks "legitimize both the /U.S./ defense and counter-attack." France's largest paper, France Soir, declared that while the first Communist attack might have been interpreted as an "isolated" event, the second "was without doubt the result of a deliberate policy on the part of Hanoi, probably with the agreement of Peiping." Rome's Voce Repubblicana called the American action "inevitable" in the light of the attacks.

Along with acceptance of the legitimacy of the U.S. action went evident relief that the President had ordered only a "limited response." The London Times approvingly noted that "the operation had been conducted with the principle of minimum force well in mind," and liberal Le Soir of Brussels headlined: "No extension of the theater of hostilities in Southeast Asia, but 'positive and limited' response against naval patrol boats and the Hanoi regime's naval bases." Independent conservative Giornale d'Italia referred to the "firm U.S. reaction to . . . Communist aggression," but also stressed that the President's TV message was delivered "with calm and cautious words." Elite Le Monde of Paris described the President's speech

as a "mixture of firmness and prudence" and several dailies lauded him for "steady nerve," "level-headedness," and statesmanship.

While there was some concern over escalation into all-out war, some counseled that "the dangers must not be exaggerated." (Stockholm's liberal Expressen). The London Times said that "the next step is left to the Communists," and noted with evident approval that after carrying out the announced counter-action, the U.S. "issued no threats or ultimatums... /and/ the Communists are not forced against a wall."

Speculation on Motivations

Many observers appeared uncertain of Communist motives. The tendency was to assume that the Communist attacks were part of some larger scheme with "political rather than military goals in mind." (Rome's Voce Repubblicana).

Other initial speculation on the Communist motives suggested that the North Vietnamese torpedo boat attacks were deliberately planned by Red China to provoke an open conflict with the U.S., so that the CPR could then "pose as the only defenders of the Communist idea." (Rome's rightist Il Tempo). Swiss and Finnish papers concurred that Hanoi might be "merely acting as an agent for Peking^{which} is out to provoke an American engagement" (Swedish-language, Nya Pressen, Helsinki) and rightist L'Aurore of Paris suggested that Peking has decided to provoke a "real explosion" in the Far East "in order to prove that peaceful coexistence is utopian."

Linked closely with this speculation was the suggestion that Peking is attempting to escalate the conflict in order to force the Soviet Union into a position where it would either have to commit itself to Chinese policy in Southeast Asia or risk a further widening of the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute. "There is a clear connection between attacks on U.S. naval units and ideological differences between the USSR and China," declared Italy's Christian-Democrat Il Popolo. Independent Die Welt of Hamburg suspected that the Communists in Hanoi and Peking "intend to force the Soviets to decide between a treacherous coexistence policy and support of a socialist state threatened by imperialism." Pro-SPD Hannoversche Presse felt the Chinese are trying to "unmask" Khrushchev as a neutralist, or "a traitor in the Communist struggle against Capitalism." The conservative Scotsman of Edinburgh wrote:

"If the Russians approve of the U.S. action -- and tacit approval will suffice -- that will be another victory for Chinese

leadership in Asia. But if the Russians come out against the United States, they will by implication be supporting the risky and revolutionary policy advocated by China. It will be difficult for them to remain uncommitted."

There was considerable speculation over implications of the crisis for the American presidential election.

Some papers, notably in France and Italy, attributed the Communist naval attacks at least in part to an attempt to benefit the Goldwater camp, thus allegedly prompting a return of the cold war once the Senator had been elected President. "The Chinese almost certainly wish to create a climate that would facilitate Goldwater's election in order to disprove the Soviet concept of coexistence with capitalism and demonstrate the accuracy of Chinese-Leninist tenets," reasoned Italy's Il Popolo.

Other papers thought the crisis would redound instead to the political advantage of President Johnson. Belgium's Le Soir declared that "it is probable that the 'firmness' preached and practiced by President Johnson will rally all American opinion to him." London's conservative Daily Telegraph emphasized, however, that "to condemn President Johnson's reaction to Communist aggression as influenced by the approach of an election campaign is absurd." The paper urged that "we be thankful that American public opinion is so resolute in the defense of American interests, which are, in this crisis, those of all free peoples."

The liberal Guardian of Manchester, reflecting what appears to be a minority view, was a good deal more skeptical than most about U.S. intentions. The paper, frequently critical of U.S. policy, suggested that "many people -- and not only Communists -- will be tempted to suspect that the American air attacks and the great movement of military power into Southeast Asia had long been planned, and required only a suitable occasion to start them off."

Prospects for Peace

The bulk of this comment suggests that the West European public hopes for some negotiated solution of the great problems in the Far East. Most frequently a solution through the instrumentality of the UN was envisaged. Various papers noted with approval that the U.S. had done everything in order to work through the UN toward a peaceful solution of any potential or actual conflict in Southeast Asia.

French papers of Gaullist orientation renewed demands for negotiation along lines proposed by General de Gaulle at his last press conference. Pro-Socialist Dauphine Libere joined this chorus: "France has called for diplomatic negotiations to Asia for a long time. It is painful to realize that the race toward the White House has until now prevented this wise solution from being adopted." Elite Le Monde declared that "the Government in Washington does not support (de Gaulle's proposals) for one obvious reason: American opinion has been so conditioned on Vietnam that it would simply take negotiation for capitulation. Johnson would be risking the White House." However, the paper concluded that after the November elections and with President Johnson still in the White House "the moment for wisdom will come."

As for the current situation, most papers conclude that the next move will be up to the Communist countries, specifically the Soviet Union and Red China. Many were convinced that the USSR would wish to maintain its present relations with the U.S. German commentators noted as an encouraging indication that Khrushchev's failure to enlarge on the conflict in the Gulf of Tonkin was "a good omen for Washington," and a leading paper in Frankfurt thought that Washington and Moscow were "in contact on the situation." There was less assuredness on possible Chinese reaction.

FAR EAST

Editorial reaction to developments in Vietnam reflected strong support and acceptance of U.S. actions in normally pro-American countries including the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Malaysia. In Japan and Thailand, while generally supporting U.S. actions, there was some doubt expressed as to the wisdom of the U.S. response. Most comment showed sober concern but there was no exaggerated anxiety.

Strongest criticism came from Burma, Cambodia, and Indonesia.

On the Communist side, both Hanoi and Peking have vigorously defended Hanoi's initial attack upon the USS Maddox as self-defense, accused the United States of fabricating the "second attack" to justify "aggression," and firmly stated their intention to defend themselves against U.S. "aggression." At the same time, however, the constant blustering chant about the "future" suggests they do not consider present incidents sufficient justification for enlarging the conflict at this time.

Widespread Support for U.S. Action

The Far East non-Communist reaction to the United States' retaliatory action in North Vietnam generally reflected support, based on the belief that it was inevitable.

The Manila Bulletin struck the keynote of the preponderant press reaction when it characterized the American action as showing "firmness tempered by restraint. The Bulletin contrasted this attitude with that of "some people here and abroad (who) would rather get it over with before Communist China can grow into a thermonuclear giant that can gobble up her small neighbors. Such sanguinary ideas," it concluded, "should have no place in a world divided, trying its best to get along on the basis of live and let live under a regime of international law and order supervised by the United Nations."

The same respect for restraint was shown by a Manila Chronicle editorial: "the prudent stance of President Johnson on the Tonkin Gulf incidents can be considered as good an illustration as any of the fallacy

of the 'extremism' policy enunciated by Senator Barry Goldwater..." This sentiment was similarly voiced by the Philippines Herald. "President Johnson," it declared, "makes it ... clear that the United States is not rushing pell-mell into another war, nor does it now intend to provoke one."

Japan, both officially and unofficially, supported the United States action -- though, in some cases, with a sharper note of alarm than was evident elsewhere in the Far East. The public media widely reported Chief Cabinet Secretary Suzuki's official statement on the situation: "We believe it was inevitable for the United States to have launched the limited and appropriate counteraction announced by President Johnson against two attacks."

Although the U.S. retaliation seemed "somewhat belated" to Korea's Donga Ilbo, the daily praised the government for its stand: "The recent hostile actions by the Viet-Minh against United States Navy ships on the high seas were deliberate, aggressive acts and therefore must be retaliated against. Otherwise it would be hard to expect the establishment of international peace, which all mankind craves." The editorial likewise termed the retaliation a "justifiable action in the interest of peace."

Added to Seoul's regret that American action was belated, was Taipei's fear that the United States would not go far enough. "The United States," urged the Central Daily News, "should take the entire area occupied by the Viet-Minh as the target of its actions and should aim at destroying the fighting power of the Viet-Minh regime."

Concern and Caution

Mixed with this commendation in a few countries, Japan most strikingly, was a strong element of alarm that American retaliatory action might touch off a full-scale war. For example, Tokyo's Yomiuri's editorial was a veritable sermon. Conceding that the U.S. retaliation had not been characterized as the "so-called drive to the North," the paper argued that, judged objectively, it must be regarded as tantamount to "the spread of the fighting into North Vietnam." The North Vietnamese Government and Communist China, at least, "Yomiuri" contended, "are sure to interpret the United States action as an open attack." "If the aim (of the retaliatory action) is to make the United States prestige and determination known to North Vietnam," the paper concluded, "we should hold that the aim has already been

attained. Further continuation of local operations," it warned, however, "would only lead to the danger of involving the whole land of Vietnam in a quagmire war and no advantage can make up for that danger. (Moreover) if tactical nuclear weapons should be employed against North Vietnam . . . the rising nations of Asia and Africa would certainly concentrate their censure on the United States' brutal procedure," nor would it be possible for the United States to avoid the criticism of its western allies, including France."

Other Japanese dailies similarly editorialized on the need for caution. Sankei's plea was typical: "we earnestly hope that the United States will act with great prudence and calmness. The problem may bring about a situation which will require prior consultations between the United States and Japan under the United States -- Japan Security Treaty . . ." Asahi, Japan's largest daily, also added a note of concern.

According to AFP, Phim Thai, the largest Thai-language daily, stated that "The headlong rush into battle by American war vessels with North Vietnam is something all those who hoped for peace feared might happen." The editorial called President Johnson's moves a "violent reaction, but acknowledged that he had the support of the American public and placed the onus of provocation on the Communists.

Critical Views

The Indonesian press gave its readers an almost unanimously critical view of U.S. actions through sensational headlines, generally one-sided news coverage, and editorial comment. Criticism was most severe in the far left press, which featured the Hanoi version of the incidents. News coverage frequently was behind developments, and official comment -- often a controlling factor -- was not available to the press.

Harian Rakjat, the Communist party paper, headlined its Hanoi version of the story, "U.S. Increase Provocations Against DRV." Chinese Communist-influenced Bintang Timur blared "Insane Series American Decisions -- U.S. Has Already Attacked Vietnam." The moderate left Suluh Indonesia captioned: "American Warships Violate DRV Waters -- Does U.S. Wish to Expand War in Vietnam?" The independent, army-influenced Garuda headlined, "U.S. Attacks DRV -- U.S. Aircraft Drop Bombs and Rockets -- DRV Will Reply in Kind." Editorial comment from the name paper declared: "We Curse the

American Actions as Rash and Dirty. Moderate Duta Masjaraket carried only the U.S. version of events, but captioned the story, "Don't Just Drive Them Off But Destroy Them -- President Johnson Orders Navy."

Burmese editorial comment coming from the extreme leftist press strongly condemned U.S. "imperialism" for its "provocative activities" against the DRV. The Daily Mirror stated that "U.S. imperialism is carrying out armed attacks against the DRV under the pretext of retaliatory action against the gunboats of the DRV. But the fact is that it is U.S. imperialism which has sent its naval and air force into the territories of the DRV to attack the latter." The Leader denounced the U.S. and editorialized: "U.S. imperialism, relying on its mighty military strength, is bullying small nations like Korea, Cuba and Vietnam."

In Japan, left-wing organizations ranging from Communist and Communist-dominated groups to the Japan Socialist Party voiced strong disapproval of U.S. actions.

An earlier editorial in the Cambodian Depeche du Cambodge reportedly took a sarcastic slant charging that the "impudence and arrogance of the imperialists know no bounds."

Motives for North Vietnamese Attacks

The most commonly expressed explanation for the North Vietnamese attacks was Communist China's testing of its "paper tiger" thesis. For example, in Hong Kong, Sing Tao Jih Pao suggested that "Communist China will continue prodding the North Vietnamese Communists to attack United States warships with torpedo boats. According to the Communist line of thinking, once a United States vessel is sunk this way, they can vociferously scream: 'United States imperialism is a paper tiger.'" Similarly, Seoul Shinmun: "Traditionally, Red China has belittled the strength of the United States, calling it a 'paper tiger' and has publicized that it could not take any action in Southeast Asia before the Presidential election."

Communist Reaction

Both Hanoi's and Peking's pronouncements are defiant in tone and warn that they will defend themselves. At the moment, however, they sound more as if they were standing at bay rather than considering any enlargement of the conflict. Both maintain that the U.S. had long planned expansion of the Vietnam hostilities and that the second incident was a "fabrication" intended to justify the subsequent U.S. air attacks against North Vietnam.

NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Despite appearance of the words "war" and "danger of war" in newspaper headlines, the tone of the limited editorial comment in the Near East and extensive comment in India has been relatively restrained. Except for a few sarcastic digs in Pakistan, Lebanon and Cyprus at the U.S. decision to use its might against "tiny North Vietnam," the situation was seen by most in terms of North Vietnamese provocation and understandable U.S. retaliation which, it was hoped, would be limited. A political rather than military solution was urged. The U.S. was charged with outright aggression only in the Syrian press and by Communist newspapers. In the Arab world, Pakistan and isolated Indian and Turkish papers President Johnson was accused of surrendering to "Goldwaterism".

Concern Expressed

Concern rather than deep anxiety characterizes South Asian reaction. Possible future actions, rather than past ones, are generally feared as potentially escalating to war.

"Shock and dismay" at U.S. retaliatory action is expressed by the Economic Times of Bombay. "If... events are left to take their inevitable course, the world might well be landed with full-scale war," it warns. Communist China's possible reaction causes Jugantar of Calcutta some concern. "If China accepts the challenge of the United States' aggressive attitude and replies to the threat," the paper says, "the dangerous game will bring the United States to the brink of war."

Radio Cairo's summary of an al-Gumhuriya article emphasizes the possibility of escalation: "The shadow of war has begun to appear on the horizon as a result of the dispute between America and North Vietnam."

In the Karachi press, more alarmist treatment is given to the events by the vernacular press than by the English-language press. The vernacular press warns of the danger of World War III.

In Lahore, Pakistan, English-language Pakistan Times says, "However limited the present U.S. action against North Vietnam may be, there is imminent danger of Chinese involvement, and once that happens the world will be faced with another Korea-type war."

Athens' largest afternoon paper Ta Nea headlined its story: "Are the U.S. and Red China Being Led into War?... Is Red China Aiming at World Conquest?" And Turkey's Milliyet, fearing the possibility of war, predicts "it will take a long time to put out the fires in Southeast Asia."

Blame

In Cairo, al-Gumhuriya sees the U.S. action as the latest in a series of steps taken by the U.S. to sabotage the Geneva Agreements on Indochina.

While in South Asia it seemed to be generally recognized that the U.S. had been provoked by North Vietnamese attacks, the Times of India is the only paper that has questioned the necessity for the presence in these waters of the 7th Fleet, which only invites retaliation. "If the torpedo boat attacks were provocative, so also were the activities of the destroyers in the vicinity of Vietnamese territory," it declared.

The Indian Express in Bombay places onus for any escalation of the war on Hanoi and "its patron and prime instigator, Peking," as does Nepal of Katmandu. "America has demonstrated that she is no paper tiger," writes the Indian Express, while "China ironically will herself be exposed as a paper tiger."

In Lahore, the Pakistan Times approves American action in taking the issue before the U.N. Security Council, but questions the wisdom of the "mounting 'retaliatory' offensive," and states that "no sane person believes that brinkmanship will ever secure 'freedom and peace in Southeast Asia' nor will it serve America's own future interests in the region."

In Karachi, both the English and vernacular press carry the DRV claim that the U.S. charge of a second torpedo boat attack is "fabrication" and that American destroyers were in DRV territorial waters during the first attack.

Commenting on this, the Pakistan Times of Lahore says: "This is not the time to concentrate on discovering who caused the first provocation in the Gulf of Tonkin because the incidents of the last few days cannot be treated in isolation from the wider conflict in South Vietnam and the rest of former French Indochina."

Motivation Ascribed

In South Asia, only consistent critics of the U.S., the Times of India and Jugantar of Calcutta, have thus far criticized U.S. motives, both attributing President Johnson's actions to the domestic political consideration of silencing opposition criticisms.

While the Times of India does not think the U.S. government has any desire to escalate the present crisis into a war, it believes Johnson is being influenced by domestic politics into actions which could result in a major crisis:

"With Goldwaterism now firmly in the American political scene, President Johnson will no doubt find it increasingly difficult to avoid at least the semblance of 'strong action' against North Vietnam. This in turn could generate irresistible pressure in favor of larger military commitments which, by inviting retaliation, could easily develop into a major crisis."

Calcutta's Jugantar termed Johnson's action a "political stunt" aimed at removing Vietnam as an issue in the political campaign.

In Cairo, al-Gumhuriya asks rhetorically: "Was it the Vietnamese boats that started aggression against the U.S. destroyers?" Its answer: "In fact, striking North Vietnam is an old U.S. dream." The paper then went on to say that President Johnson's action may have been motivated by the election campaign and Senator Goldwater's demand for action in Vietnam.

Communist Motives

Calcutta's Statesman, found it "hard to understand" what prompted North Vietnam to attack U.S. warships. "If Communist forces are out to provoke the United States into rashness--which seems the only possible explanation--there must be cool enough heads in Washington to see that measures in retaliation are effective but not allowed to get out of control," it said.

Ankara's Cumhuriyet says "Peking's goal is to damage Johnson and convince the American public that Goldwater's ideas are right /s^o th^at/ a war between America and Russia, resulting in the destruction of both, would leave Red China as the only powerful country in the world."

LATIN AMERICA

That Latin Americans see the events in Vietnam as a serious threat to world peace is indicated by the rapidity with which all media reacted to the attacks in Tonkin Gulf. Extensive press and radio coverage show a high degree of preoccupation with the affair, which has largely diverted attention from the problem of Cuban sanctions. Moreover, editorial response was more immediate than is usually the case with extra-hemisphere events. However, the only known Communist reaction was restricted to Cuba.

Latin American editors generally support the U.S. position, even though they are concerned about the danger of an expanded war. They place the blame for this possibility on the Communists, especially on the Red Chinese. The Cuban media, however, as might be expected, accused the United States of deliberately trying to expand the war.

Support for U.S. "Hard Line"

"The new hard line" of U.S. strategy, "resulting from North Vietnamese guerrilla action," is supported by an editorial in El Espectador of Bogota. The commentator further supported the U.S. position by emphasizing that "the United States will not give in to armed pressure.... It is committed to a strategy of peace and war." La Nación of Buenos Aires counselled that, faced with "the magnitude of the Chinese danger, the West should strengthen its position in Asia ... with decision and energy." This theme was also developed by Atisbos of Mexico City: "The United States is truly determined to assume a new attitude toward communism ... and, although it does not want war, it is ready to run that risk in order to defend the interests of the Free World." The editorial viewed President Johnson as being convinced that "mere protests would serve no end but to encourage the enemies of civilization." The U.S. reprisal against the North Vietnamese was characterized by Panama's Radio Mía as "a matter of defending democracy and the dignity of man." And Honduras' public media publicized Foreign Minister Fidel Duron's official telegram to Secretary Rusk, informing him of Honduras' "firm solidarity" with "U.S. actions in support of freedom and the defense of peace."

Red Chinese Guilt

The press widely attributed the North Vietnamese attack upon the USS Maddox as Peking-inspired. La Prensa of Buenos Aires, for example, declared that "the Communists of Southeast Asia follow the imperialist and racist policy of Peking" and cited the attacks upon the American destroyers as "good proof" of (what La Nación called) "the aggressive impulse of Peking." El Espectador similarly editorialized: "Proof of Chinese Communist aid to the North Vietnamese guerrillas exposed this previously disguised civil war as a much higher level crisis." The position of the Brazilian press is reflected by the headline in Diario Carioca which proclaimed: "American Vessels Suffer New Communist Aggression."

Fear of Expanded War

"This new Korea in Asia is filled with dramatic and unforeseeable consequences," speculated Bogota's El Espectador. In the opinion of Panama's Radio Mía, to defend democracy, the United States "is determined to run the risk of a war, the beginnings of which can be seen, but the end of which no one can even imagine." The commentator, making reference to "clouds of war," expressed the special concern of Panama "because of our (strategic) geographical position." Peruvian newspapers similarly emphasized the gravity of the tense situation.

Cuban Accusations

Cuban media accused the United States of engaging in "aggression" and "provocations" and seeking "a pretext" for extending the war. Following the second attack, wide publicity was given to a Foreign Office spokesman's reference to President Johnson's "warlike" policies. TV commentator Luis Gómez Wanguemert declared that the "U.S. aggression" had been planned in advance. Elaborating upon "the unjustified attack perpetrated by the U.S. armed forces," the Cuban media compared the present U.S. "provocations" with the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961: "Washington has invented a false story, as they did before Giron Beach, to unleash war against a brother nation in Southeast Asia."

AFRICA

African comment, limited so far to Liberia, Libya and Tanganyika, is generally moderate. (Early reactions from Algeria and Ghana, which had indicated support for the North Vietnamese, have not been heard again.)

All papers have expressed a great concern for continuing world peace. The Tanganyikan ruling party daily, The Nationalist, feared that the situation might lead to a "chain reaction" if Communist China takes sides, and expressed hope that the U.N. Security Council would bring the dispute to an "immediate halt." On the other hand, the pro-government Liberian Star said that the North Vietnamese reaction would be "more important" than a U.N. attempt to lessen tension. It hoped that the North Vietnamese would realize the depth of the American commitment in South-east Asia, and refrain from taking any further action that could escalate the conflict. The European-controlled Tanganyika Standard expressed confidence that the "speed" of the American counter-stroke would "discourage" any such action.

The Liberian Star and Tarabius al-Gharb, Libya's official daily, both expressed concern that the crisis would affect the East-West "detente." Both papers called for wider adherence to the nuclear test ban treaty-- possibly a reference to Communist China's opposition to it.

African press and radio have generally refrained from taking sides in the conflict. Tanganyika's Nationalist implied that this conflict might be part of a U.S. -South Vietnamese plan to extend the war, but held back from an accusation. The paper called the U.S. decision to attack North Vietnamese bases "disturbing."

SOVIET UNION AND EAST EUROPE

Soviet media described the U.S. action in North Vietnam as an "unprovoked aggression," but the tone of Soviet propaganda created the impression that Moscow is seeking to avoid more active immediate involvement. In its summary of the Hanoi statement on U.S. air activities over North Vietnam TASS remarked that the "aggressive actions by the U.S. military have aroused the burning indignation of all the Vietnamese people." In its report on the Security Council meeting, however, the Soviet news service quoted Adlai Stevenson as saying that "peace and the preservation of the independence of friendly states was the only thing" the U.S. sought in Southeast Asia. TASS briefly, belatedly, and without comment reported the Chinese government statement alleging that the "situation has become extremely serious." Soviet media are suggesting that U.S. actions stem from American domestic pressures. According to Radio Moscow the "air attack on North Vietnam is being accompanied by a political hullabaloo clearly connected with the forthcoming Presidential election."

No reports are as yet available from Bulgaria, Rumania or Albania. Other East European media reported the developments in the afternoon and evening of August 5, first in the version of their Washington and New York correspondents. At the same time they publicized the North Vietnamese version and added comment of their own. The gist of this reportage and comment is that the "aggression in Tonkin Bay" was prompted either by the Khanh regime's desire to extend the war to North Vietnam or -- more widely emphasized -- by an alleged Presidential wish to forestall Republican electioneering claims that the Administration is following a course of weakness in its foreign policy.

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File

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

CONFIDENTIAL

August 7, 1964

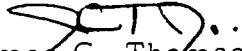
MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BUNDY

SUBJECT: Background of Saigon's 343

The Saigon news item is taken from an interview yesterday of Bill Bundy by John Scali. Portions of the interview were released on ABC News last night at 10:30 p. m. I attach a portion of the transcript that relates to the Saigon cable.

I am told that Bill's response was based on earlier discussions during the day that focused on the probability that we would be hit hard during the UN debate on Operation 34-A. The press has already carried certain items on this operation, and 34-A was treated in some detail before a large audience yesterday at the Congressional hearing on the joint resolution.

State intends to reply to Saigon by forwarding the transcript of Bill's remarks and indicating that Bill's approach will probably be the one we will continue to take in answer to future questions.


James C. Thomson, Jr.

Att.

NOTE: I am also attaching a McNamara transcript that touches on the same question.

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